

Language Backs Expanding Increment 1 Aircraft to Replace Current, Aging Fleet

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today helped the House approve a measure that encourages the Pentagon to continue procuring Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 presidential helicopter and to use it as the primary helicopter for the president. While the survival of the helicopter program still faces many hurdles in the weeks and months ahead, Hinchey said the support of the current Lockheed Martin program is an indication that many legislators on Capitol Hill are not prepared to buy into the mistaken plan to terminate the project. The language supporting the continuation of Increment 1 was included in the report accompanying the defense authorization bill for fiscal year 2010.

"Today's vote of a measure that supports the continuation of Increment 1 is very encouraging for our efforts to save the VH-71 presidential helicopter program. However, there is a lot of work that remains to be done and many obstacles we have to still overcome," Hinchey said. "Plain and simple, canceling the current presidential helicopter program now and then restarting it from scratch will cost taxpayers far more than it would to finish what's already been started. Expanding the development of Increment 1 helicopters is the most fiscally responsible way forward and it is also the timeliest way to deliver a modern, secure fleet of helicopters to the White House."

The House Armed Services Committee last week approved the legislation. Prior to that panel's vote on the legislation, Hinchey personally urged the chairman of the committee and the chairman of the subcommittee that has jurisdiction over the development of the presidential helicopter to support the continuation of Lockheed Martin's Increment 1. As part of the report that accompanies the Defense Authorization bill for fiscal year 2010, Congress expresses its disappointment with the way in which the presidential helicopter was handled by the previous administration and "strongly suggests" that the Pentagon consider saving taxpayer money by continuing the development of Increment 1 "for use as the normal transport for the President..."

The report language also notes that the Pentagon should examine the development of a secondary aircraft that would be used in emergency situations. Hinchey said a secondary aircraft could potentially come in the form of Lockheed Martin's Increment 2 helicopter, which is a more sophisticated and further technologically advanced version of the Increment 1 helicopter.

Now that the House has approved its defense authorization bill, the focus shifts to the annual defense appropriations bill where funding is allocated for various defense projects. The congressman is continuing to work very aggressively to have the House pass a defense funding bill for fiscal year 2010 that includes the necessary money to carry out the House-approved recommendation that Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 be continued and used as the primary presidential helicopter. Hinchey, who is a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, said he intends to use his position on that panel to attempt to have funding inserted for the helicopter. The subcommittee is expected to meet on July 13 to vote on the spending bill, which includes the presidential helicopter.

In explaining its reasoning for supporting Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 presidential helicopter, the House Armed Services Committee last week echoed many of the concerns Hinchey has expressed as to why it would be a huge waste of taxpayer money to cancel the program now. At least \$3.2 billion has already been spent on the current presidential helicopter program. If the program is canceled, early termination fees would bring the total cost to approximately \$4 billion and result in no helicopters replacing the aged presidential fleet. Hinchey has argued that an entire new fleet of modern, Increment 1 presidential helicopters can be completed within the original budget constraints of the project.

The committee also agreed with Hinchey's argument that the Pentagon's plan to rebid the entire project would be far more costly than it would be to simply continue the current program, which has already produced nine helicopters that have undergone more than 800 hours of test flights. Internal Navy estimates that were made public in a Congressional Research Service report, indicate that a rebid helicopter project would cost between \$10 and \$17 billion. When the \$4 billion already spent on the program is factored in, the overall cost rises to between \$14 and \$21 billion, which is far more costly than it would be to continue the production of Lockheed Martin's Increment 1. That figure does not include approximately \$1.25 billion in maintenance costs for the current, aging fleet.

"I am very grateful for the language in support of Increment 1 that was included in the report accompanying the defense authorization bill," Hinchey said. "This is a good step forward, but there are many steps ahead. I will continue to fight with all my might to save this presidential helicopter program from being scrapped for no good reason. Continuing with Increment 1 is the right thing to do for U.S. taxpayers and most importantly for the safety of this and future presidents."

The current presidential helicopter fleet was designed more than a half century ago, constructed in the 1970's, lacks secure communication lines, is defective in other ways, and is forced to

undergo costly and constant maintenance and repairs.